

fchat the lords struggled hard to retain the villeins in bondage, and, in all cases where they dared, continued to exact such of the old services as were not yet commuted. Hence arose a war, corresponding to the war over the statute, the contest being in this case for freedom instead of for higher wages. As the century wore on, the struggle became more embittered. The 'flights' of the villeins were not the only form it took. The * flight' was essentially the act of an enterprising person, ready to sacrifice his status and slink away through the woods in search of a new life. A whole community of land tenants would never take such a step, and if they did it would be impossible for them to conceal their escape and prevent recapture. And so, as we should expect, we find from the manor rolls that 'flights,' though frequent, were acts of isolated individuals.¹ When the demand for freedom became universal among the villeins of a manor, they formed a union, stirred to do so perhaps by the attractive example of the free labourers, and openly refused to do their old services for the bailiff unless they were paid wages. This bold stroke for liberty, however illegal, cannot but elicit the full sympathy of their descendants, born to freedom. The villeins appear to have shown such an ugly temper and such a determination to resist, that the bailiffs and their masters had to appeal to Parliament for force to support their rights. In 1377 a statute was passec^ the preamble of which perhaps throws more light on the causes of the Peasants' Eising than any other single passage. Complaint has been made by the lords of manors, * as well men of Holy Church as other,' that the villeins on their estates * affirm them to be quite and utterly discharged of all manner of serfage, due as well of their body as of their tenures, and will not suffer any distress or other justice to be made upon them ; but do menace the ministers of their lords of life and member, and, which more is, gather themselves together in great routs and agree by such confederacy that every one shall aid other to resist their lords with strong hand: and much other harm they do in sundry manner to **the** great damage of their said lords and evil example **to**

¹ T. W. Page, 35-8 ; Cambridge Manor.